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Rachel Reinhart

Wilmington College, rachel.reinhart2016@gmail.com

Erika Smith-Goodwin

Wilmington College

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Socialization into Athletic Training Student Leadership

Rachel Reinhart, Erika Smith-Goodwin, PhD, AT, ATC
Wilmington College, Department of Sport Sciences, Wilmington, Ohio

CONTEXT

Leadership is important in every field, particularly in health care,¹ and despite its importance, it can be a difficult concept for students and professionals alike to define. It is essential that leadership behaviors are developed in students early, as leadership benefits the student, the profession as a whole, and patient outcomes.² More research should examine methods to socialize these behaviors into students.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' socialization into athletic training leadership by examining the Student Senates of two athletic training professional organizations, the Ohio Athletic Trainers' Association (OATA) and the Great Lakes Athletic Trainers' Association (GLATA), as well as students in an undergraduate athletic training education program with no athletic training leadership experience and assessing their traits, motivating factors, and other involvements.

DESIGN AND SETTING

The instrument of this study was a survey. The survey was distributed via email and completed online. Student Senators were from many different institutions, while the group of undergraduate athletic training students were from one Division III college in Ohio.

PARTICIPANTS

There were a total of 75 (N=75) potential participants in this study; 30 (n=30) from the GLATA Student Senate or OATA Student Senate and 45 (n=45) other athletic training students. Participants were selected based on a convenience sample. Surveys were distributed to all participants, and 56 (n=56)

surveys were completed for an overall return rate of 74.6%. 22 (n=22) Student Senators completed surveys and 34 (n=34) other athletic training students completed surveys, for return rates of 73.3% and 75.5%, respectively.

INTERVENTIONS

This research was approved by the College Institutional Review Board through exempted review. Content validity was established through the Table of Specifications, and face validity was established through review from experts. Descriptive statistics (frequency counts and percentages) were used for all applicable items. A Chi Square test was used for all hypotheses with Senate/non-Senator status as the grouping variable. The alpha level was set at $p=0.05$ *a priori*. SPSS 24.0 was used to analyze the data.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS

The survey was comprised of 15 questions. Questions 1, 13, 14, and 15 included demographic information. Question 2 required the subject to select one answer from a prescribed list. Question 3 allowed participants to check all given options that apply to them and provided an optional "other" category for a custom response. Question 4 required participants to check three options that applied to them most accurately out of a total 6 options. Questions 5 and 6 both utilized a Likert scale from 1 to 5. For Question 5, the value 1 was "extremely ineffective" and the value 5 was "extremely effective". For Question 6, the value 1 was "not at all" and the value 5 was "a great deal". Questions 7 and 8 both used a Likert scale from 1 to 5 with the value 1 being "extremely unimportant" and the value 5 being "extremely important". Questions 9, 10, 11, and 12 allowed participants to check all

options that apply to them as well as the optional “other” category.

RESULTS

When asked about participation on the Student Senate, 95.4% (n=21) of Senators indicated that they sought involvement for resume building and networking opportunities. Opportunities to meet influential individuals in the profession, opportunities to network with professionals, exposure to seeing leadership at the state/district level, and having a position in the Senate and accomplishing tasks that go along with it were the top factors that Senators indicated the Student Senate best utilized to develop their leadership, at 77.2% (n=17), 72.7% (n=16), 68.1% (n=15), and again 68.1% (n=15), respectively. 95.4% (n=21) of Senators answered that the Student Senate prepared them to be a leader in their chosen field either effectively or extremely effectively, and the same amount also said that participation on the Student Senate strengthened their desire to be a leader in their field either some or a great deal. Strong feelings on the importance of leadership were clear from many respondents. When asked to rank the importance of leadership in their chosen field, Student Senators answered 59% (n=13) “extremely important” and 22.7% (n=5) “important”. Students that were not Student Senators answered 44.1% (n= 15) “extremely important” and 38.2% (n=13) “important”. Additionally, both groups were similar in how they ranked the importance of being involved with the professional organization of their chosen field. Student Senators answered 54.5% (n=12) “extremely important” and 31.8% (n=7) “important”. Students that were not Student Senators answered 35.2% (n=12) “extremely important” and 44.1% (n=15) “important”. Students in both groups held similar numbers of other involvements, though there were differences in the types of these involvements. 40.9% (n=9) of Senators answered that they were involved with three other non-Senate organizations. Similarly, 32.3% of non-

Senators (n=11) answered that they held three involvements. The most popular other involvements of Student Senators included pre-professional organizations at 86.3% (n=19). For non-Senators, the most popular involvements included varsity sports at 50% (n=17). Most respondents, regardless of group, held one leadership role in high school. Of these leadership roles, the most common was National Honors Society, at 68% (n=15) and 50% (n=17) of Student Senators and non-Senators, respectively. There were slight differences in the number and types of athletic training leadership positions that were considered by Senators and non-Senators for their future careers. Most Student Senators reported considering three of the given positions at 27.2% (n=6). The most common positions considered by Student Senators included the head athletic trainer at a college or university at 77.2% (n=17) and a board member of a local, state, district, or national athletic training organization at 59% (n=13). For non-Senators, most reported considering one of the given positions at 29.4% (n=10). The most popular positions considered for non-Senators included the head athletic trainer for a high school at 58.8% (n=20) and head athletic trainer for a college or university at 44.1% (n=1%). None of the four hypotheses tested were statistically significant.

CONCLUSIONS

From these findings, it is evident that Student Senators feel strongly that their participation in the Senate has been effective in their leadership development. This shows that this is one way to socialize more students into leadership in the profession, especially because Senators reported considering more athletic training leadership positions than non-Senators, and were different in the types of positions they reported considering. However, despite not holding a formal leadership role in a professional organization as a student, non-Senators ranked leadership and involvement as being equally as important. From this it is possible that students may have a drive for leadership and

may just need encouraged by their mentors to get involved. Leadership education should also be a part of the athletic training educational curriculum to develop leadership behaviors in students.

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KEY WORDS: *Athletic Training Students, Student Leadership, Athletic Training Education*